

City train yard tentatively selected as site of port transfer station

Scaled-back facility at Mount Clare would let CSX double-stack trains

By [Michael Dresser](#), The Baltimore Sun

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The state, city and CSX Transportation have tentatively selected the Mount Clare train yard in Southwest Baltimore for a roughly \$90 million facility where containerized cargo would be transferred from trucks to trains, a project designed to improve the Port of Baltimore's efficiency.

The project would help the port and CSX by allowing the railroad to bypass the more than century-old Howard Street Tunnel, which is too low for passage of trains with containers stacked two high. Such double-stacking of truck-sized shipping containers is the most cost-effective way to move them by rail.

Leif A. Dormsjo, senior adviser at the Maryland Department of Transportation, said Tuesday that his department had notified General Assembly fiscal leaders that it would focus its planning and engineering efforts on CSX-owned Mount Clare, one of four city sites considered for the facility.

Dormsjo said the project, known as the Intermodal Container Transfer Facility, had been scaled down in both size and expense from previous proposals, which would have located it in suburban counties south of Baltimore. Those sites — especially one in Elkridge — met with significant local opposition that threatened long delays in the facility's opening.

This spring, Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake urged the railroad and state officials to take a fresh look at sites in Baltimore, which already has extensive railyard facilities. Officials also considered city sites in Mount Winans, Locust Point and Curtis Bay.

The Mount Clare Yard is just south of Interstate 95 where it crosses over Washington Boulevard, near the communities of Morrell Park and Wilhelm Park. Dormsjo said the yard was chosen largely because the other facilities were more essential to CSX's current train operations.

Gov. Martin O'Malley said the intermodal project would help Maryland take advantage of what he called "the twin revolutions in commerce" — a widening of the Panama Canal to accommodate larger ships and CSX's National Gateway Initiative, which would remove obstacles to double-stacking between the East Coast and the Midwest.

"Working in lock-step with Mayor Rawlings-Blake's administration, I'm confident we can deliver a project that fosters good-paying jobs, business growth and strong communities," the governor said in a statement Tuesday.

The Mount Clare choice is contingent on approval by the city and leaders of the legislature's budget committees, Dormsjo said.

There is little reason to think City Hall will be an obstacle. The mayor's office released a statement welcoming the news.

"A new rail intermodal facility will help Baltimore keep and grow jobs in the city while securing our port's future economic growth for the next generation," Rawlings-Blake said. "This represents a significant economic investment in Baltimore and we look forward to working with the State of Maryland and CSX to review the proposal to utilize an existing rail yard and fully consider all related issues."

Cost estimates for the four suburban sites studied ranged from roughly \$140 million to \$320 million, but Dormsjo said the scaled-back plan calls for spending \$30 million in state transportation funds, with CSX kicking in the remaining \$60 million to \$65 million.

The site, which is under 70 acres, would be much smaller than the proposed suburban locations, Dormsjo said. But the Mount Clare Yard will be large enough to do the job, he said.

"We've scaled back our expectations and in doing so have made the project more straightforward," Dormsjo said.

CSX confirmed the change of plans. The Jacksonville, Fla.-based railroad said the transfer station would be a state-of-the-art intermodal facility that would become the first in any East Coast port city to use zero-emissions electric crane technology.

"As we do in every intermodal terminal development project, CSX has assured the state and city that we will engage the public and, to the best of our ability, address any concerns," CSX spokesman Robert Sullivan said.

Containers carrying imports would arrive at the intermodal facility from the Seagirt Marine Terminal on trucks or single-stacked trains, which would use the Howard Street Tunnel. Once at the transfer facility, the containers would be double-stacked on CSX trains for shipment to the Midwest. For exports, the process would operate in reverse.

Dormsjo said the state planned to move \$2.5 million from the Transportation Trust Fund into its spending program for next year to cover the cost of planning and engineering at the site. He said the goal was to have that process completed by next September and to open the facility in May 2015, roughly when the expansion of the Panama Canal is expected to be complete.

The port of Baltimore also has hitched its fortunes to the canal expansion. It has entered into a long-term lease with Ports America to deepen the berth at Seagirt and to add new cranes there to

accommodate the mammoth container ships that are expected to sail directly from Asia to the East Coast once the project is finished.

Dormsjo said Ports America was consulted about the change of plans for the intermodal facility.

The new plan would rely entirely on state and CSX money instead of on federal funds. Dormsjo said that would allow the state to proceed outside the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act, which governs projects financed with federal dollars. The federally mandated process includes rigorous hearing and environmental impact study requirements and can lead to delays in projects that encounter public opposition.

He said, however, that public hearings and informational meetings would be held.

Councilman Edward L. Reisinger, whose 10th District includes the Mount Clare Yard, said he welcomed the project but also had concerns. A Morrell Park resident, the Democratic councilman said the yard was an industrial area with residential neighborhoods to the south and west.

"My concern is the ingress and the egress to the site," he said. "I don't want to see [truck traffic] go through a residential street."

Reisinger said he had discussed the site with the railroad before the site was chosen.

"CSX has committed that they will sit down with the community and the businesses to work on their grievances and concerns," he said.

The joint decision by the state and CSX appears to end any possibility that an intermodal facility would be built south of the city — a prospect already became iffy when CSX decided in June to terminate its agreements to purchase land in Elkridge. That site had run into particularly heavy resistance from nearby residents, local elected officials and state legislators.

Also under consideration were a site along Montevideo Road off U.S. 1 in Howard County, another near the state prison complex in Jessup, and a third in Beltsville in Prince George's County. Dormsjo said all the sites faced at least some opposition.

michael.dresser@baltsun.com
